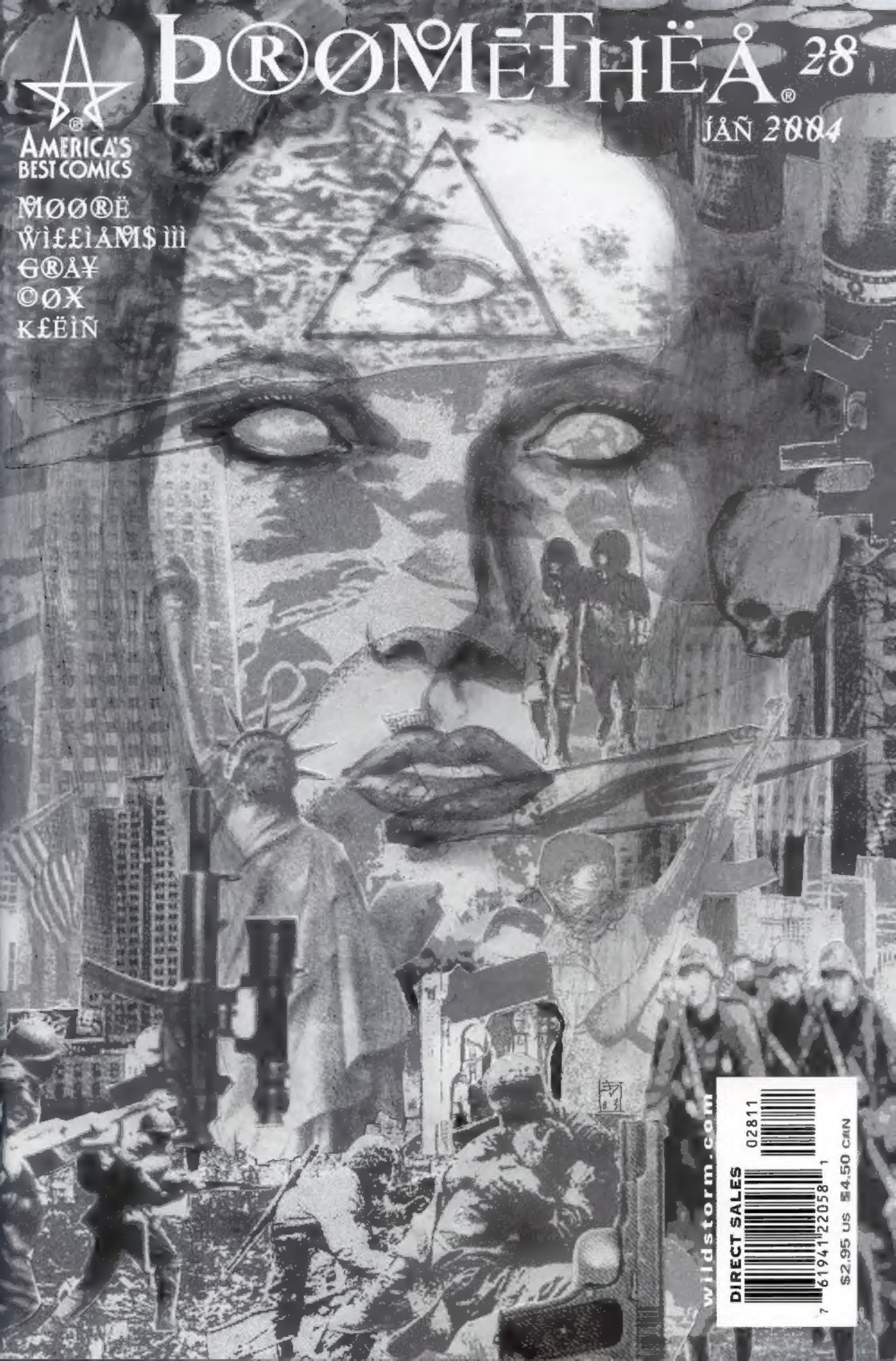
PROMETHEA 28
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We all looked up to blinding spectacle, said holy this or holy that, so it was like the terrible blue day again, but night now, with two towering absences more visible, more heavy than the gone mere solids raised before, our captured rooks, when curling in on that same dreadful, beautiful elliptic, New York's gaudy hot-ass fabulous apocalyptic angel spirit, three years gone, entered again into her city, burger wraps and discount coupons spread like palm fronds at her feet that had a diamond sweat, a filth of powdered gold between the toes and everybody suddenly remembered that each brick, each busted tail-light in this mad stampede of world and time was Holy, to be loved, and there was no more and so on and so on, no more yadda yadda.

PROMETHEA

DON'T THEY KNOW IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD? (IT ENDED WHEN YOU SAID GOODBYE)

LUCILLE, I...
...THIS ALL FEELS WEIRD. HOW DID WE GET FROM NEW YORK TO MILLENNIUM AHEAD OF HER?
WE...I DON'T KNOW. WE OVERTOOK HER, I GUESS. I'M NOT EVEN CERTAIN WHAT MONTH THIS IS.
ME NEITHER. I THINK OUR TIME-PERCEPTION'S SLIPPING.
EVERYTHING'S GOING NUTS.
THAT SMEE THING'S BEEN SOLID FOR OVER AN HOUR, SCREAMING AND BEGGING TO BE LET OUT. DRUCKER'S WEEPING. VANDERVEER'S PRACTICALLY CATATONIC...
YEAH, YEAH, HOLD ON A MINUTE. KAREN? ARE YOU OKAY?
I'M...IT'S JUST THIS DEJA-VU THING WHERE I'M... I DON'T KNOW.
I'LL BE FINE.
EVERYONE FEELS STRANGE. MY GUESS IS THAT MS. BANGS IS GENERATING A STRONG ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELD AS SHE APPROACHES.
please please PLEASE!
Let me OUT! Do you know who I AM? Do I know who I am?
That SMEE, that SMEE, that SMEE...
please
I SEE IT'S STILL RAVING. HOW ARE THE OTHERS?
TH-THEY'RE ABOUT THE SAME. YOU BETTER GO SEE FOR YOURSELVES...
...that SMEE, that Smee in the CORNER, losing my religion...
SO HOW COULD ELECTROMAGNETISM BE CAUSING ALL THIS?
IT CAN CAUSE TEMPORAL LOBE SEIZURES, RELIGIOUS VISIONS...
HERE. TAKE A LOOK AT DRUCKER.
I'M SORRY. I'M SORRY. I'M SORRY FOR WHAT I'VE DONE.
I'M SORRY FOR WHAT I'VE DONE.
I'M SORRY.
JESUS. BUT...I--I DON'T UNDERSTAND. EVEN IF IT IS A FIELD OF SOME SORT, WHY IS IT SO STRONG HERE?
WHY DO I FEEL SO... FUNNY?
MAYBE YOU'RE SUSCEPTIBLE... OR MAYBE BANGS IS HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THIS HOLDING FACILITY.
WHAT, YOU MEAN SHE'S COMING HERE?
THAT'S WHAT FAUST THINKS. HE SEEMS PRETTY CONFIDENT.
OH GOD. LUCILLE. WE...WE MADE THIS HAPPEN.
NO! TOM GODDAMN STRONG, HE MADE THIS HAPPEN! AND WHERE IS HE NOW. HUH?
NOW THE WORLD FINALLY NEEDS 'EM, WHERE ARE ALL THE SCIENCE HEROES?

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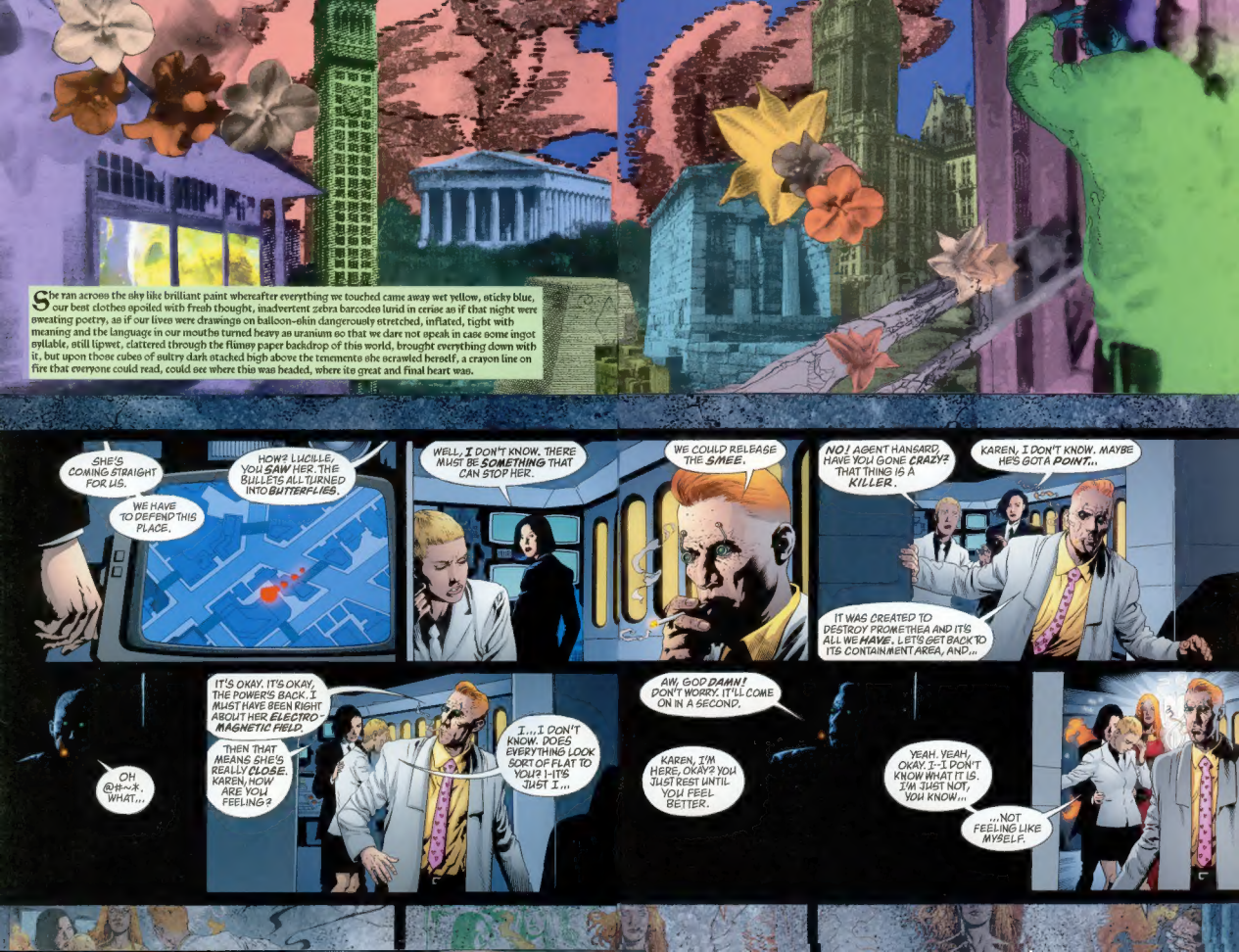
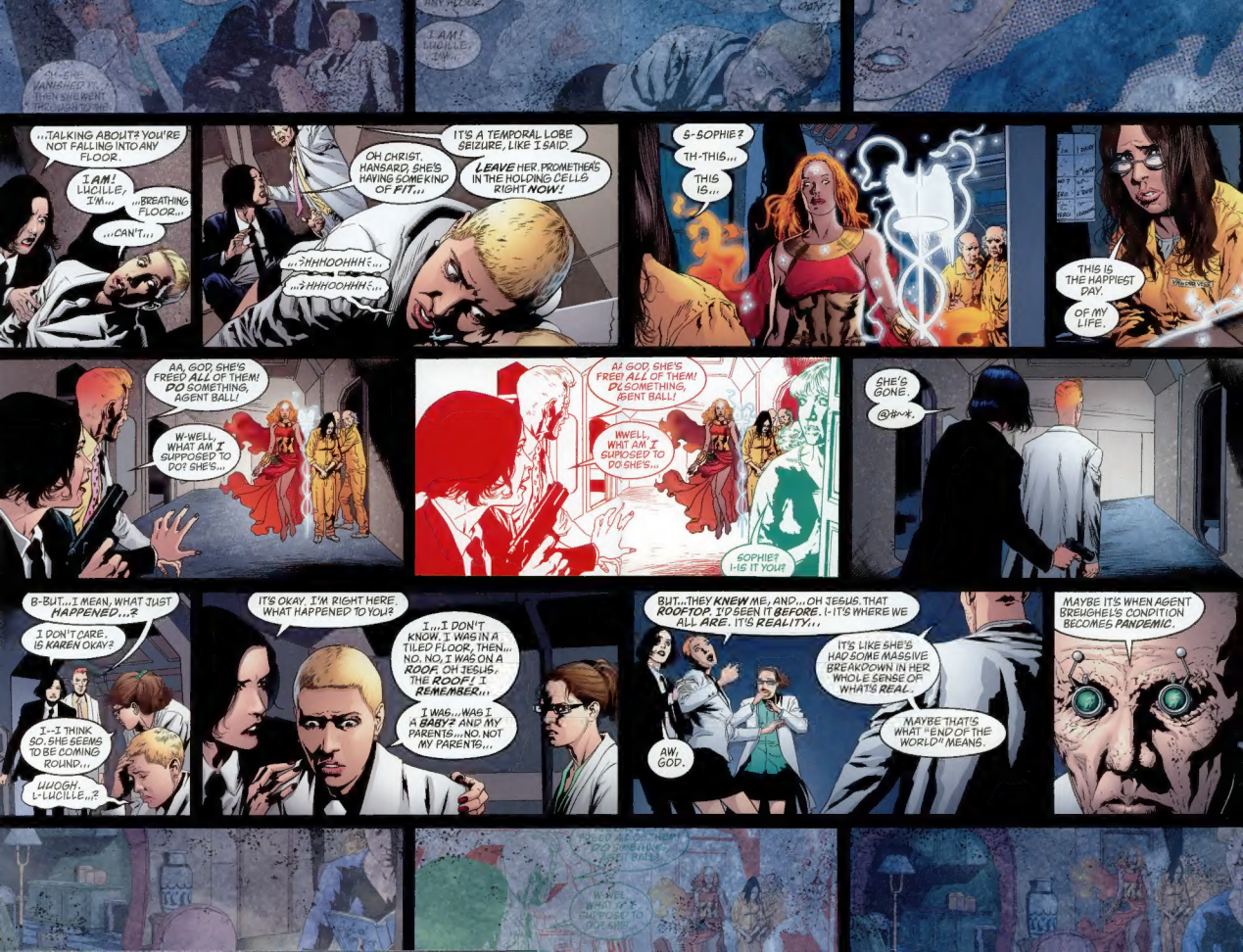
WE GOT YOUR PROMETHEA ALERT. STAN'S GETTING PLATFORM FOUR READY FOR DESCENT TO NY RIGHT NOW. HEY, LISTEN,,,
JUST A SECOND, KENNETH. MARV, WHAT DID YOU MEAN JUST NOW? ABOUT YOUR "BIG REVELATION?"
I--I DON'T KNOW. IT WAS THIS DEJA-VU FEELING,,,
,,LIKE I'D REMEMBERED I WAS ABOUT TO HAVE THIS...BREAK-THROUGH, OR WHATEVER.
I-IT SOMEHOW INVOLVED THAT OLD JELLYHEAD CASE, BUT,, NO. NO, I CAN'T REMEMBER.
WEIRD. WELL, I GUESS WE SHOULD ASSEMBLE IN THE DROP BAY,,,
UH,,, MARV? CAN WE TALK?
WHAT IS IT?
WELL,,, LOOK, I DON'T EAVESDROP ON PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ALL THE TIME, OKAY? BUT,,,
...BUT I JUST SORT OF CASUALLY SCANNED STAN AND HE WAS THINKING ABOUT THIS LONG LIST OF ELECTRICAL PARTS HE HAD TO COLLECT.
WELL, SO WHAT?
METACRYST OF NEBULA
NOTHING... EXCEPT I REMEMBER READING STAN TWO YEARS BACK, AFTER WE LOST BOB AT THE WTC.
H-HE WAS THINKING ABOUT THAT SAME LIST OF PARTS, IN THE SAME ORDER.
THAT'S ODD.
UH...GUYS? MAYBE WE SHOULD SAVE THIS FOR LATER, OKAY?
HEY, WHAT KEPT YOU GUYS? I THOUGHT THIS PROMETHEA BUSI-NESS WAS AN EMERGENCY.
OH, WE WERE JUST TALKING ABOUT PROMETHEA AND STUFF. YOU CAN TAKE US DOWN NOW.
SO, UH,,, WHAT'S GOING ON EXACTLY? WHY IS PROMETHEA BACK IN NEW YORK?
WE DON'T KNOW. AFTER THAT BIG FIGHT LATE IN 2000, SHE PRETTY MUCH VANISHED.
THEN THERE WAS SOMETHING ON THE NEWS EARLIER ABOUT TOM STRONG AND MILLENNIUM CITY.
EARLIER? WASN'T THAT, LIKE, A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO?
I--I THINK SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH TIME.
YES. MAYBE IT'S SOMETHING TO DO WITH PROMETHEA. MAYBE THAT WOULD EXPLAIN MY DEJA-VU EXPERIENCE,,,
WHAT EXPERIENCE WAS THAT, BUDDY?
MARV FELT LIKE HE WAS ABOUT TO HAVE SOME BIG REVELATION CONCERNING THE OLD BRUNO SMILIAC MURDER.
YOU REMEMBER. JELLYHEAD.
JELLYHEAD? MAN, THAT WAS WHAT, THREE YEARS AGO? MAYBE IT'S TIME TO, YOU KNOW, MOVE ON.
I DON'T KNOW. IT'S JUST,,, WHY WOULD THE PAINTED DOLL KILL BRUNO SMILIAC OF ALL PEOPLE? IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
HUH. YOU THINK THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE?
JUST LOOK AT NEW YORK.


She ran across the sky like brilliant paint whereafter everything we touched came away wet yellow, sticky blue, our best clothes spoiled with fresh thought, inadvertent zebra barcodes lurid in cerise as if that night were sweating poetry, as if our lives were drawings on balloon-skin dangerously stretched, inflated, tight with meaning and the language in our mouths turned heavy as uranium so that we dare not speak in case some ingot syllable, still tipwet, clattered through the flimsy paper backdrop of this world, brought everything down with it, but upon those cubes of sultry dark stacked high above the tenements she scrawled herself, a crayon line on fire that everyone could read, could see where this was headed, where its great and final heart was.
SHE'S COMING STRAIGHT FOR US.
WE HAVE TO DEFEND THIS PLACE.
HOW? LUCILLE, YOU SAW HER. THE BULLETS ALL TURNED INTO BUTTERFLIES.
WELL, I DON'T KNOW. THERE MUST BE SOMETHING THAT CAN STOP HER.
WE COULD RELEASE THE SMEE.
NO! AGENT HANSARD, HAVE YOU GONE CRAZY? THAT THING IS A KILLER.
KAREN, I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE HE'S GOT A POINT...
IT WAS CREATED TO DESTROY PROMETHEA AND IT'S ALL WE HAVE. LET'S GET BACK TO ITS CONTAINMENT AREA, AND...
OH @#~*. WHAT...
IT'S OKAY. IT'S OKAY, THE POWER'S BACK. I MUST HAVE BEEN RIGHT ABOUT HER ELECTRO-MAGNETIC FIELD.
THEN THAT MEANS SHE'S REALLY CLOSE. KAREN, HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
I... I DON'T KNOW. DOES EVERYTHING LOOK SORT OF FLAT TO YOU? I-IT'S JUST I...
AW, GOD DAMN! DON'T WORRY. IT'LL COME ON IN A SECOND.
KAREN, I'M HERE, OKAY? YOU JUST REST UNTIL YOU FEEL BETTER.
YEAH. YEAH, OKAY. I-I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS. I'M JUST NOT, YOU KNOW...
...NOT FEELING LIKE MYSELF.

JESUS CHRIST, WHAT...
AAA! AGENT HANSARD! AGENT BALL! SHE'S HERE! SHE'S ALREADY HERE!
please...i-just listen...
When I was dirt and rain, I was HAPPY. I--I didn't want to be me.
Please, Mother. Please don't punish me.
POOR CHILD.
YOU WERE NOT BORN, BUT ONLY FASHIONED, AS A SCOURGE.
DON'T BE AFRAID, IT IS NOT PUNISHMENT I BRING.
IT IS RELEASE.
GO, LITTLE ONE.
GO AND BE UNIVERSE AGAIN.
GAA...
WH-WHAT HAPPENED? WHERE'S THE SMEE?
KAREN? KAREN, TRY TO STAND UP...
CAN'T. LUCILLE, I'M SLIPPING. DON'T LET ME GO. DON'T LET... ME FALL... INTO THE FLOOR...
SH-SHE VANISHED IT. THEN SHE WENT THROUGH TO THE HOLDING CELLS...
KAREN, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? YOU'RE NOT FALLING INTO ANY FLOOR.
I AM! LUCILLE, I'M...
...BREATHING...
...FLOOR...
...CAN'T...
...CAN'T..
up she DOWN comes GOES again
I AM, LUCILLE. I'M...
...BREATHING...
...FLOOR...
...CAN'T...
HANSARD! SHE'S HAVING SOME KIND OF FIT...
LEAVE HER, PROMETEAN. IN THE HOLDING CELLS. RIGHT NOW!
...HHHOOHHHS...
THIS IS...

remember AAREN hello us are WE here you AGAIN
:HOOH: :HHOOOHH: :HOOH:
:HOOH: :HHOOOHH: :HOOH:
...BREATHE. WHAT I? CAN'T...
:HOOH: :HHOOOHH: :HOOH:
YOU WORRIED TIME BABY don't worry DOWN fell A CRACK CRACK into FOLDED little
:HOOH: I'M HERE I'M GETTING BACK into MY BODY NOW ON HOLD CAN'T WAIT LIFE HELLO
BEFORE here you remember BORN AFTER A TRAUMA AGO HAPPY DIED
:HOOH: :HHOOOHH: :HOOH:
DEATH DOUND that's DEATH
...CAN'T...
SHE down COMES goes AGAIN


...TALKING ABOUT? YOU'RE NOT FALLING INTO ANY FLOOR.
I AM! LUCILLE, I'M...
...BREATHING FLOOR...
...CAN'T...
OH CHRIST. HANSARD, SHE'S HAVING SOME KIND OF FIT...
IT'S A TEMPORAL LOBE SEIZURE, LIKE I SAID.
LEAVE HER. PROMETHEA'S IN THE HOLDING CELLS RIGHT NOW!
...?HHHOOHHH?...
...?HHHOOHHH?...
S-SOPHIE?
TH-THIS...
THIS IS...
THIS IS THE HAPPIEST DAY.
OF MY LIFE.
AA, GOD, SHE'S FREED ALL OF THEM! DO SOMETHING, AGENT BALL!
W-WELL, WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO? SHE'S...
SHE'S GONE.
@#*%.
B-BUT... I MEAN, WHAT JUST HAPPENED...?
I DON'T CARE. IS KAREN OKAY?
I--I THINK SO. SHE SEEMS TO BE COMING ROUND...
UUOGH. L-LUCILLE...?
IT'S OKAY. I'M RIGHT HERE. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
I... I DON'T KNOW. I WAS IN A TILED FLOOR, THEN... NO. NO, I WAS ON A ROOF. OH JESUS, THE ROOF! I REMEMBER...
I WAS... WAS I A BABY? AND MY PARENTS... NO. NOT MY PARENTS...
BUT... THEY KNEW ME, AND... OH JESUS. THAT ROOFTOP. I'D BEEN IT BEFORE. I--IT'S WHERE WE ALL ARE. IT'S REALITY...
AW, GOD.
IT'S LIKE SHE'S HAD SOME MASSIVE BREAKDOWN IN HER WHOLE SENSE OF WHAT'S REAL.
MAYBE THAT'S WHAT "END OF THE WORLD" MEANS.
MAYBE IT'S WHEN AGENT BREUGHEL'S CONDITION BECOMES PANDEMIC.

Then New York dimmed to shadow sixty stories deep where thousands tramped the bridge or hung from creaking tailboards on a crawling, manpiled truck so it felt like Bombay, like Tijuana, as if all the cities of the Earth were made one simultaneous place but we were in the darkness cursing, stumbling, kissing, giggling, excited kids on campout and it's August with Chemical Ali caught alive, it's April with him dead, October and the news is very bad, our moments folded in together like flat pages, facets, long months crunch down to a single headlight-speckled jewel of final night that made Time seem a small place, its first incandescent boom just yesterday, made our six billion seem a family of five, this boundless Universe a glittering mere town, a blackout street, a galaxy-stuffed house, a solitary beloved room...
AA, G-SHE'S FREED ALL OF THEM! DO SOMETHING, ASEBALL!
W-WELL WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO? SHE-
SOPHIE? I-IS IT YOU?
SOPHIE? I-IS IT YOU?
YES, IT'S ME. I'M HOME FOR GOOD, MOM.
IT'S SO WONDERFUL TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
I'VE MISSED YOU, BABY. I'VE... IS THAT STACIA?
H-HELLO, MRS. BANGS.
THANK... THANK YOU FOR HAVING ME OVER.
OH GOD, YOU POOR KID. WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU?
THEY'VE HAD HER ON ANTI-PSYCHOTIC DRUGS. THAT'S WHY SHE'S PUT ON ALL THE WEIGHT.
MOM, WE'RE ALL GOING TO BE STAYING HERE A WHILE.
YEAH. IT'S FUNNY. I'VE BEEN SORT OF EXPECTING YOU. SOMETHING BIG'S HAPPENING, ISN'T IT?
YES.
OH, THIS IS DENNIS AND JACK, BY THE WAY. THEY'VE BOTH BEEN THROUGH A LOT.
I'D BETTER WARN YOU THEY'RE NOT THE ONLY UNFAMILIAR FACES WHO'LL BE TURNING UP HERE.
THERE'LL BE A LOT OF INDIVIDUAL DESTINIES ARRIVING AT THIS PLACE IN THE TIMES AHEAD.
CONVERGING...
COMING TOGETHER.

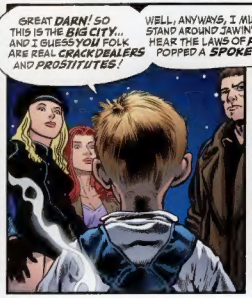
HELLO, LAUREL. GLAD EVERYBODY MADE IT HERE TO OUR OLD ARTIFICIAL ISLAND.
THIS IS JOHN RAY'S NIECE JONNI, INCIDENTALLY.
UH...HI. ARE YOU ALL SCIENCE HEROES?
EVERY INCH, PRECIOUS. LOVELY SEEING YOU AGAIN, TOM.

YOU'VE MET CLARICE. THIS IS MY FRIEND FRANK LAFAYETTE, AND MISS SCREEN-SAVER, FROM COFFEEBURG.
GOOD MEETING YOU, MR. STRONG.
OH, TOTALLY! SPLASH WAS HIBERNATING WHEN YOUR WIFE CALLED...
...SO I BROUGHT HIM AS HAND LUGGAGE!

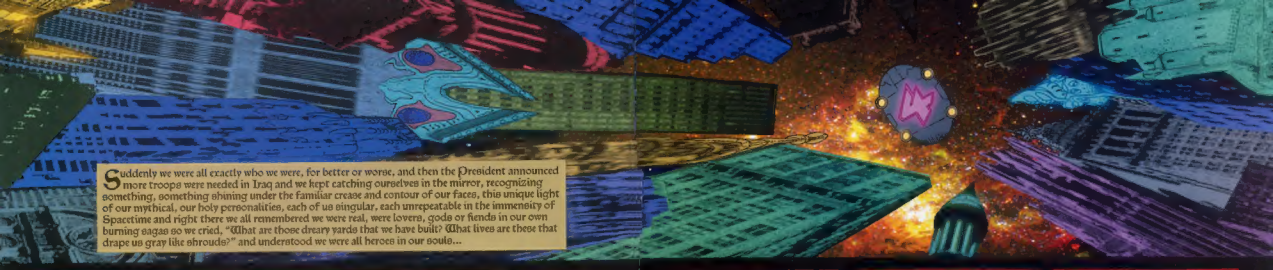
MAYBE YOU SHOULD WAKE HIM UP.
IS ANYONE ELSE EXPECTED?
WELL, MY GOVERNMENT CONTACTS RECOMMENDED SOME MIDWESTERN FELLOW THAT THEY'RE FLYING HERE NOW. HE'S FRIGHTFULLY DANGEROUS, APPARENTLY.
HELICOPTERS ARE APPROACHING, OH OPAL OF THE UNIVERSE.

JUNK

PFFT
PFFT


GREAT DARN! SO THIS IS THE BIG CITY... AND I GUESS YOU FOLK ARE REAL CRACKDEALERS AND PROSTITUTES!
WELL, ANYWAYS, I MUSTN'T STAND AROUND JAWIN'. I HEAR THE LAWS OF PHYSICS POPPED A SPOKE...

...AND THAT CALLS FOR SOME HARD-HITTING, POTENTIALLY VIOLENT SCIENCE!


Suddenly we were all exactly who we were, for better or worse, and then the President announced more troops were needed in Iraq and we kept catching ourselves in the mirror, recognizing something, something shining under the familiar crease and contour of our faces, this unique light of our mythical, our holy personalities, each of us singular, each unrepeatable in the immensity of Spacetime and right there we all remembered we were real, were lovers, gods or fiends in our own burning cages so we cried, "What are those dreary yards that we have built? What lives are these that drape us gray like shrouds?" and understood we were all heroes in our souls...

I DON'T LIKE THIS. SOME OF THESE BUILDINGS, THEY WEREN'T HERE YESTERDAY.
OR WERE THEY?
IT WAS A TRADEMARK DISPUTE.

BRUNO SMILIAC'S MURDER. THE PAINTED DOLL KILLED SMILIAC BECAUSE JELLYHEAD WAS INFRINGING ON HIS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY.
WHAT?
THAT'S WHY HE DIDN'T KILL ANY OTHER SCIENCE-VILLAINS.

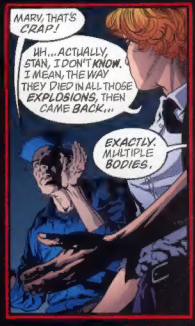
UH... MARV? YOU OKAY, BUDDY?
MARV, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
GOD, IT'S SO OBVIOUS. WHY DIDN'T I SEE IT? SMILIAC WAS STEALING THE DOLL'S ACT.

ALL ALONG, THE DOLL WAS JUST THAT: A DOLL, OFF AN ASSEMBLY LINE.
IF WE JUST FIND THE DOLL-MAKER...
THIS IS BULLSHIT. I'M TAKING LE DOWN.

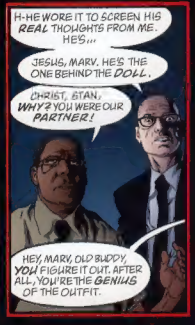
OH SWEET JESUS.
ROGER! GRAB STAN'S CAP!
HEY! WHAT THE £$%& ?

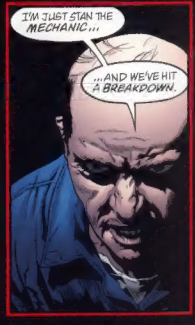
BUT... MARV, JELLYHEAD'S M.O. WAS NOTHING LIKE THE PAINTED DOLL'S.
NOT KNOWINGLY.
DON'T YOU GET IT? SMILIAC WAS RIPPING OFF THE DOLL WITHOUT REALIZING IT.

MARV, YOU'RE STARTING TO PISS ME OFF. I MEAN, WHERE'S THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN JELLYHEAD AND THE PAINTED DOLL?
MULTIPLE BODIES.
MULTIPLE BODIES CONTROLLED FROM A DISTANCE.

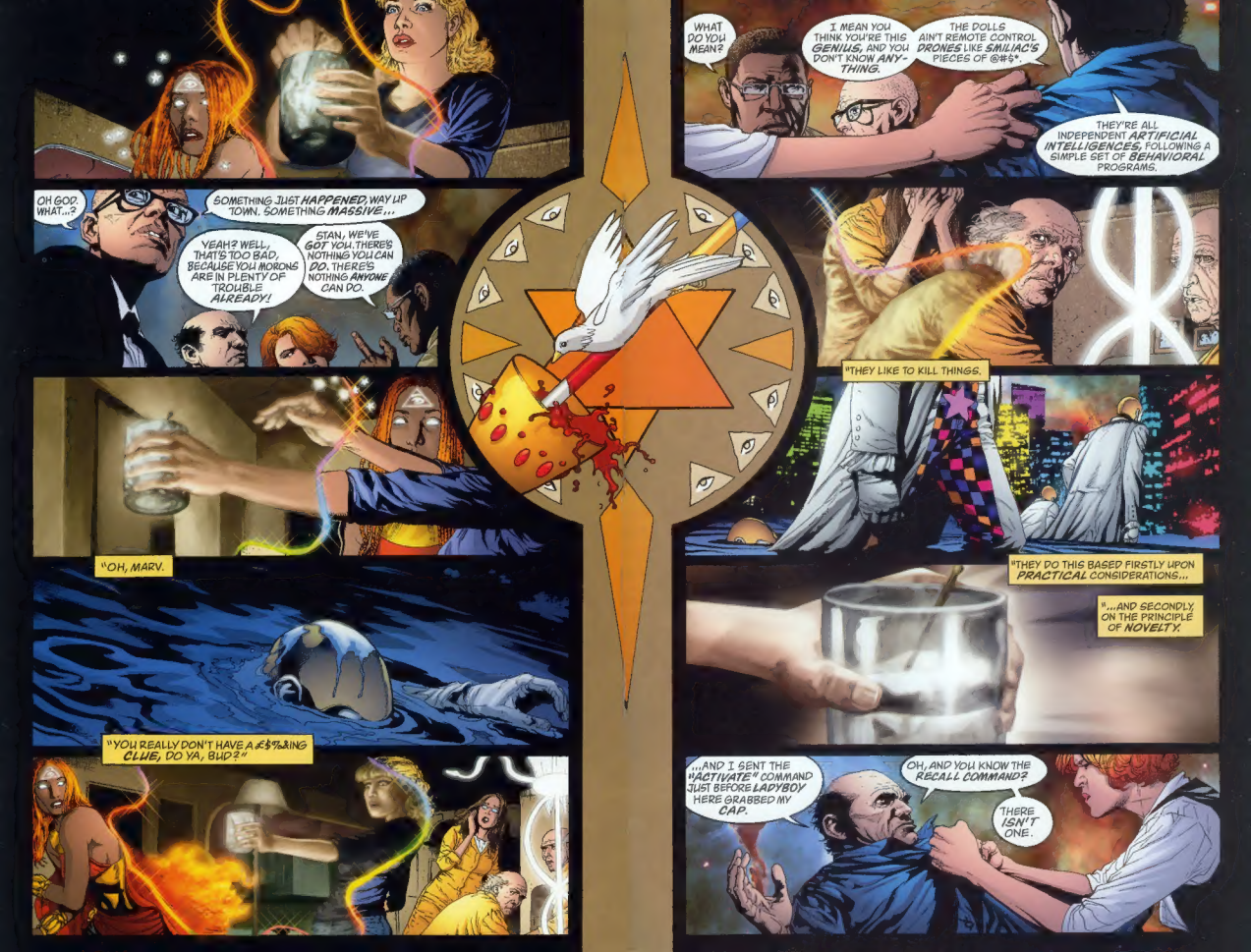

MARV, THAT'S CRAP!
UH... ACTUALLY, STAN, I DON'T KNOW. I MEAN, THE WAY THEY DIED IN ALL THOSE EXPLOSIONS, THEN CAME BACK...
EXACTLY. MULTIPLE BODIES.

YOU BASTARDS! GIMME THAT!
MARV, THIS BETTER BE GOOD.
OH GOD, ROGER, THE CAP'S THINKING! IT'S THINKING THAT PARTS-LIST AGAIN!
I-IT'S A TELEPATHIC TAPE-LOOP.


H-HE WORE IT TO SCREEN HIS REAL THOUGHTS FROM ME. HE'S...
JESUS, MARV. HE'S THE ONE BEHIND THE DOLL.
CHRIST, STAN. WHY? YOU WERE OUR PARTNER!
HEY, MARV, OLD BUDDY. YOU FIGURE IT OUT. AFTER ALL, YOU'RE THE GENIUS OF THE OUTFIT.


I'M JUST STAN THE MECHANIC...
...AND WE'VE HIT A BREAKDOWN.

Yet it always came down to a single place, some people and a situation, as if that summed up the essence of our teeming human world, so in a sense we were all right here in this one familiar room amongst these faces that we know so well and you were Jack Faust sitting trying to comfort Dennis Drucker, thinking, "Jesus, this is really it," and hoping you were ready, and me, I was Trish Bangs thinking she could use a drink right now and realizing that she didn't need one, and do you remember how we all looked round when Stacia said...
ARE WE ALL GONNA HAVE SEX?
WHAT?
STACIA, SWEETHEART, YOU'RE ON A LOT OF MEDICATION...
BUT... ISN'T THERE SOMETHING SEXY THAT HAPPENS? AND THAT STARTS EVERYTHING?
ACTUALLY, I KINDA KNOW WHAT SHE MEANS...
FOR ME, THOUGH, IT'S MORE LIKE MUSIC BUILDIN' UP, Y'KNOW? WAGNER OR SOMETHING.
YES. SOMETHING HAPPENS, DOESN'T IT? IN THE NEXT FEW MOMENTS...
I NEED ICE.
UH... WELL, SOME SAY THE WORLD WILL END IN ICE.
HA HA! SAY, THAT'S PRETTY SMART, KID. YOU'RE RECOVERIN'.
MOM? YOU'RE NOT DRINKING AGAIN?
NO, BABY. THIS IS WATER. I JUST HANG ON TO THE RITUAL, Y'KNOW?
ICE CUBES, A SWIZZLE STICK...
SWIZZLE STICK! THAT'S IT! I REMEMBER NOW...
TRISH PUTS HER PENIS... I MEAN HER SWIZZLE STICK... SHE STICKS IT IN THIS... NO.
NO, I LOST IT AGAIN.
WOMEN HAVE VAGINAS. NOT PENISES.
DENNIS...
I-- I MEAN, MY PROMETHEA, SHE WAS A MAN. A MAN INSIDE. AND I...
OH CHRIST. I LOVED HER. I LOVED HIM. WHY DID I...?
IT'S OKAY, DENNIS, EVERYTHING'S OKAY.
I-- I HADN'T REALIZED THIS WOULD BE SO INTIMATE. SO PERSONAL.
WE'RE ALL BEHAVING SO ODDLY, EVERYTHING'S SO NEAR THE SURFACE...
WHERE DID I PUT THAT STICK?
OH GOD. THE GLASS! TRISH PUTS THE SWIZZLE STICK INTO THE GLASS, AND...
YEAH. SHE'S RIGHT. I REMEMBER...
SOPHIE, IT'S LIKE THAT NIGHT WE SLEPT TOGETHER...
WAIT A MINUTE. YOU SLEPT WITH MY DAUGHTER? BUT YOU'RE...
NO, STOP! SOMEBODY STOP HER! SHE'S GOING TO DO IT!
SHE'S PUTTING THE STICK INTO THE...
...GLASS...


OH GOD. WHAT...?
SOMETHING JUST HAPPENED, WAY UP TOWN. SOMETHING MASSIVE...
YEAH? WELL, THAT'S TOO BAD, BECAUSE YOU MORONS ARE IN PLENTY OF TROUBLE ALREADY!
STAN, WE'VE GOT YOU. THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO. THERE'S NOTHING ANYONE CAN DO.
"OH, MARV.
"YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE A £$%&ING CLUE, DO YA, BUD?"
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I MEAN YOU THINK YOU'RE THIS GENIUS, AND YOU DON'T KNOW ANY-THING.
THE DOLLS AIN'T REMOTE CONTROL DRONES LIKE SMILIAC'S PIECES OF @#$*.
THEY'RE ALL INDEPENDENT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES, FOLLOWING A SIMPLE SET OF BEHAVIORAL PROGRAMS.
"THEY LIKE TO KILL THINGS.
"THEY DO THIS BASED FIRSTLY UPON PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS...
"...AND SECONDLY, ON THE PRINCIPLE OF NOVELTY.
...AND I SENT THE "ACTIVATE" COMMAND JUST BEFORE LADYBOY HERE GRABBED MY CAP.
OH, AND YOU KNOW THE RECALL COMMAND?
THERE ISN'T ONE.

HMM.
NEXT:
VALLEY OF THE DOLLS!